

“Sometimes My People Get Mad When the Blackfeet Kill Us”: A Documentary History of the Salish and Pend d’Oreille Indians, 1845–1874. Edited by Robert Bigart and Joseph McDonald. Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College Press, 2019. Distributed by University of Nebraska Press. 402 pages. \$26.95 paper.

Sometimes My People Get Mad When the Blackfeet Kill Us adds to a series of books editors Robert Bigart and Joseph McDonald have published with Salish Kootenai College Press. Each volume in the series illuminates different aspects of Salish and Pend d’Oreille life in what is now western Montana and surrounding areas. Some, like this book, are documentary histories, while others are narrative depictions of the past. While the book will be especially valuable to the Salish and Pend d’Oreille members of the Flathead Indian Reservation, it also provides good insights and material for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Montanans in general, high school and undergraduate students, and the interested public.

Mining the colonizer’s archive to illuminate Indigenous history is often fraught with frustration and heartache. Editors Robert Bigart and Joseph McDonald recognize that the opinions of many observers whose records this book is sharing are inaccurate and hurtful. With a broad audience in mind, both on the back cover of the book and in the first words of the introduction, the editors warn the readers of the biases and limitations of their sources, “Readers’ Discretion Advised,” the back cover says in bold, and, on page 1, “almost all of these sources were written by white people who saw the tribe through the distortions of western European values and white bigotry.” The editors sought to capture the words of Indigenous leaders, but recognize that, in most cases, those words were recorded by white observers or acquaintances. This was true even in the instances when Indian leaders sent letters such as their petition to President Ulysses S. Grant urging him to honor the 1855 Hellgate Treaty (Document 60). As with many written primary sources, these documents nonetheless are worth reading, albeit with a critical eye.

The editors have collected a massive body of documents for this book, and from those chose carefully, specifically selecting those writings and drawings that would illustrate devastating intertribal warfare, the introduction and acceptance of Christianity, intergovernmental relations, relationships with invading white populations, and the beginning of the adoption of farming and cattle ranching. They include newspaper articles, some of which record stories told by tribal members to reporters; journals of missionaries; published recollections of stories told by tribal members to those who wrote them down; official federal government documents; archival collections of stories told both contemporaneously and as recollections, or stories passed down in families; and a series of drawings by Father Nicolas Point. The eighty-two documents are chronologically arranged into six chapters, with each chapter’s documents

revealing insights into large and small features of Salish and Pend d'Oreille life. At the beginning of each document the editors note the source as well as a brief description or discussion.

The years covered by these documents reflect a time of great change for the Salish and Pend d'Oreille people, beginning just before they signed the 1855 Hellgate Treaty and continuing into the years when they were being crowded off of their southern land base by a growing white settler population. The documents reveal the tumultuous experiences of this era and Salish and Pend d'Oreille experiences with the changing landscape and with both people of a variety of Indigenous nations who were their neighbors and the encroaching white population.

Chapter 3 is especially enlightening regarding Salish and Pend d'Oreille efforts to remain in their homelands. It covers the years 1855 to 1859, from the negotiations leading to the 1855 treaty through its ratification in 1859. A portion of the tribe under the leadership of Victor remained in the Bitterroot Valley despite United States efforts to force them to accept removal to the current reservation in the north, which was established in the treaty. Tribal leaders hoped that their relationship with the local white population would help protect both Indians and whites from their longtime nemesis the Blackfeet. The final chapter, covering the years 1870 to 1874, includes documentation of federal efforts to remove the Indians from the Bitterroot Valley after Victor's death and the efforts of tribal members to remain in the rich farmlands located there.

The role of the Catholic church is portrayed in documents interspersed throughout the book. Many of these documents were penned by priests. They indicate a growing influence of this Christian religion within the tribal nation, and the impact on individuals. In some cases, success in battle was attributed to conversion to Catholicism, which was recognized not only by Salish and Pend d'Oreille people, but by their enemies as well. Indirectly, this reflects the belief systems in tribal communities that attribute success in many endeavors, including warfare, to intercession by supernatural beings who bring aid to individuals who have created alliances with them.

Interspersed with the political and religious documents are papers that describe war parties and battles that help illustrate the shifting alliances among mountain and plains tribes into the 1870s. These documents also give a sense of the vast geographic landscape that was contested by tribal nations on the one hand, and on which Indigenous people from a wide variety of Indigenous communities utilized the resources. As Salish and Pend d'Oreille people settled on both the Flathead Reservation and in the Bitterroot Valley, from which they would eventually be tragically expelled, the shift toward farming and ranching is evident in the documentation.

The documents make clear that tribal efforts to farm their rich south lands were hampered by the failure of federal officials to meet US treaty obligations. As is the case with other Indigenous nations, tribal leaders often seemed to understand the terms of their treaties better than the officials assigned to oversee their welfare. The failure of the United States to observe its trust responsibility is glaring.

The documents in this book are both engaging and enlightening, and, when read with a critical eye, can lead to lively classroom discussion. They can also be used as

a jumping-off point for research into this critical period of the history of the people of the Flathead Indian Reservation in Montana, and both internal tribal community events and relations with the Indigenous and white peoples living around the Salish and Pend d'Oreille peoples. Together they provide a valuable look into the lives of Salish and Pend d'Oreille people in a crucial time in their history.

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